11. An Appraisal

PROFESSOR C. Wright Mills, the non-conformist American sociologist, in his posthumous publication *The Marxists* made a significant observation: "As with most complicated thinkers, there is no *one* Marx." And, "There is of course no one liberalism and no one marxism."[1] Had he made a close study of Gandhi and his philosophy he could as well have uttered in the same vein: there is no one Gandhi and no one Gandhism. The various presentations of Gandhi's philosophy which one can construct from his writings,* written at different times in the process of his own development, depend upon one's point of interest, and one may not take any of them to be The Real Gandhi. It is interesting to compare what contemporary and latter-day commentators and politicians have selected, and laid stress on, from the writings of Gandhi. A valuable study could easily be made about it. Such a study, if undertaken, would necessarily indicate what aspects of Gandhi appealed to whom and a discerning analysis might also suggest why. But let us be brief. Gandhi has been presented as a prophet, a mystic, a saint, a theologian, a religious devotee—a genuine Christian, a *Sanātanī* Hindu—, a moral preacher, a social reformer, a non-violent revolutionary, a shrewd politician, a utopian, a strange combination of all these, an embodiment of contradictions: sanctity and cunning, reforming zeal and conservatism, moral passion and crude superstition, religious devotion and political manoeuvring, and above all—an enigma. A portrait-

* Speeches and interviews of Gandhi are indistinguishable from his writings since all the important interviews that he gave or the speeches that he made have been recorded in the files of *Young India*, *Harijan* and other books containing selected passages subjectwise.

study of Gandhi is well beyond our present scope. But the man behind the philosophy cannot escape our attention. Fichte rightly said : 'As the man is so is his philosophy.' This is particularly true of Gandhi who incarnated his message in his life. A historical figure often baffles our understanding for his is not an 'average' personality. The task of finding out the real core of the thought and philosophy of an enigmatic or a highly complex personality involves discrimination. This general principle applies equally well to Gandhi and his social and political philosophy. The task is difficult, but it is inescapable too. Every student of Gandhian philosophy must *earn* his own Gandhi.

Objectivity and detachment or neutrality are not the same thing. We do not pretend to be detached. An attitude of detachment does not enable one to select and discriminate. Neutrality is as subjective as the narrowest prejudice or the blindest passion. Objectivity demands scrupulous regard for and correspondence to facts and at the same time forbids *arbitrary* selection of such facts in order to prove a pre-conceived or pre-determined construction. But, all the same, objectivity does not issue any injunction for suspension of judgement. Political philosophy cannot be conceived without its political orientation. When we attempt to answer 'What is Gandhism', or any 'ism' for that matter, our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question of what view we take of the society in which we live. Thus the element of interpretation enters.

One may rightly assert, from the academic point of view, that Gandhi contributed much to political theory. The synthetic or syncretic character of his thought, his ethical idealism in the domain of politics, introduction of non-violence as an instrument of resolution of intra-state and inter-state conflicts, etc., may be cited as instances. These are indeed his significant contributions. But one must make a deeper probe into the positive content of Gandhi's political thought.

Gandhian political philosophy, like other political philosophies, contains some temporary, local and non-essential elements as

much as it carries within it some enduring and universal aspects. One should sift the essential from the non-essential, the abiding sentiment from an immediate prescription. Political philosophy as we have seen earlier (see p. 7 *supra*) reflects an ideology, a statement of ideals, a designation of agency and a set of social theories. As an ideology, Gandhism is an expression of the response to the challenge of a specific historical period and as such its validity for the future is liable to limitation. Secondly, Gandhian doctrine, as in the case of other doctrines,* has been made vulgar and banal. It has been canonized only to debase its true spirit. It has been presented as a closed system of a set of fixed theories expressing the acme of absolute truth. This view of Gandhism as an ideology is antithetical to the kernel of what we understand Gandhism to be. On occasions without number, philosophical rationalization has been made of Gandhism only to make it appear as a philosophy of maintaining and preserving the *status quo*. It has been illegitimately used as a cover to put a curb upon the urges and aspirations of the toiling people for a happy and prosperous existence and a bright future. His philosophy has often been propagated to be a philosophy of collaboration among the contending social forces and of meek submission to injustice and iniquity, a philosophy of quietism. In our foregoing analysis we have seen that his non-violence stood at the farthest remove from quietism. Gandhi's non-violence does not teach meek submission

* cf. "What is now happening to Marx's doctrine has, in the course of history, often happened to the doctrines of other revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes struggling for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes hound them constantly, attack their doctrines with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaign of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to say, and to surround their *names* with a certain halo for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating the revolutionary doctrine of its *content*, vulgarizing it and blunting its revolutionary edge. At the present time, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists in the labour movement concur in this revision of Marxism. They omit, obliterate and distort the revolutionary side of its doctrine, its revolutionary soul. They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie."—V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Chapter I, *Selected Works, two-volume edition*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1947, vol. 2, p. 143.

to injustice, it calls forth courage to fight oppression. As has been correctly observed by an eminent non-conformist Indian Marxist theoretician : "Anything that denied the value of the human personality, or sought to dominate it or subjugate it by physical force against its own free will, was regarded by him as 'violence', or 'untruth' which must be resisted at any cost. He was a votary of non-violence in that fundamental sense and not in the sense of seeking to reconcile himself, in a spirit of opportunism, to any particular form of society or the powers that might rule over that society for the time being. To say the least, he was absolutely incapable of that kind of opportunism or compromise."[2] But however tragic it is, there is nothing strange about this debasement of the essential core of Gandhi's political thought. It was perhaps Renan who once said that when Fate could not destroy a great man it sent him disciples in revenge.[3] Gandhi, too, could not escape that lot of great men.

A correct appreciation of Gandhi demands that he must be viewed in the proper historical perspective.* The strength and weakness, the achievement and limitation of his philosophy can only be assessed from that point of view.

Gandhi voiced an indignant protest and raised the standard of revolt against foreign subjugation, economic exploitation and what is more fundamental—dehumanization of man that accompanies modern civilization. One reviewer has said : "...the philosophy of Gandhi...appears essentially to be a philosophy of protest."[4] But it was more than an individual protest. Gandhi gave that protest a concrete shape and transformed it into collective action. This was indeed an historic achievement of Gandhi.

Gandhi's supreme contribution to the Indian nationalist movement lies in the fact that it was he who created a mass

* cf. "...Tolstoy's views must be appraised not from the standpoint of present-day Socialism (such an appraisal is, of course, needed, but it is not enough), but from the standpoint of that protest against approaching capitalism, against the ruination of the masses and their divorcement from the land, which had to arise from the patriarchal Russian countryside."—V. I. Lenin, 'Leo Tolstoy As The Mirror of the Russian Revolution', *Proletarii*, No. 35, September 11(24), 1908, in *Articles On Tolstoy*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1951, pp. 10-1.

basis for that movement. The great historic significance of Gandhi is that he evolved a technique of direct mass action which placed unhesitating reliance on the creative political role of the common masses of the people and on their independent initiative for action. Gandhi's plea for disciplined mass action and mass initiative immediately opened up a new dimension in our political struggle and imparted to it a depth, a volume and a momentum hitherto unknown. It widened the social basis of the movement unprecedentedly and tapped for itself never-failing resources of power.[5] Gandhi gave a life-tonic to the semi-paralysed people. As Clare Sheridan notes : Gandhi, like Lenin, gave a "message that has enabled the humble to raise their heads, and recognize their place in the sun."[6]

What was the basic drive behind Gandhi's political philosophy and technique of action ? The ultimate inspiration for the idealism of Gandhi, like that of any other humanist, came from the great importance he laid on basic human values. Humanism is the key point and the enduring element of his philosophy.* Humanism takes its origin from the rebellion of man against inhuman conditions and its single aim is the aim of the recovery of man's lost humanity. The question of attaining the goal of human well-being engaged the best minds of mankind through the ages. There is, so to say, a historical continuity in the articulation of the humanist ideal. It is true that many of these humanists spoke in a language now strange to us and also, on many occasions, from the point of view of religious movements and religious beliefs. True also that general maxims which have survived for hundreds

* We use the word 'humanism' advisedly. One may object to the employment of such a term on the ground that India has not experienced humanism of the European Renaissance type and 'humanitarianism' might be an apt description. This argument does not carry conviction with us. We deliberately refrain from using the expression 'humanitarianism' in assessing the content of Gandhi's thought, since the same expression has been usually associated with philanthropy and apolitical activities. Gandhi, we consistently maintain, was immensely political, and though a very kind man, did not advocate philanthropy since it does not serve any effective social purpose. For his views on the subject, see *Young India*, 13.10.21, p. 325 ; 13.8.25, p. 282 ; 24.2.29, p. 58.

and thousands of years take on new content under new social conditions. For every epoch has had its own type of humanism. Yet the humanist content of the commandment 'love thy neighbour as thy self'* has survived for two thousand years. Absolute morality and absolute commandments are of no consequence from the standpoint of social science. "But it is a scientific truth", as Prof. Adam Schaff, a Polish Marxist thinker, reminds us, "that there are human relationships, which manifest themselves in every form of social life, and are reflected in humanist ideas, regardless of differences in social context and social outlook."[7] Gandhi inherited and enriched that noble humanist tradition. The abiding humanist content of Gandhi's philosophy being thus strongly emphasized upon, it is also necessary to understand its specific nature, its uniqueness, which is of decisive importance for investigating its character and its prospects of realization.

With Gandhi, "The supreme consideration is man."[8] He often used to say: "With me man comes first."[9] "My life is one indivisible whole, and all my activities run into one another, and they have all their rise in my insatiable love for mankind,"[10] he wrote. Man stands as the sun in the solar system of his political philosophy.[11] Even in such an esoteric field like metaphysics he wanted to realize the Absolute through service to humanity. He was of the earth, earthy, as he himself affirmed.[12]** He wanted the kingdom of God. But it was to be established not in heaven, but here on this earth, as kingdom of righteousness. He could well re-echo the German poet, Heinrich Heine:

The Kingdom of Heaven that is promised,
We want to build upon the earth.

He had no charm for life beyond; the supreme task that

* cf. "This is the sum of all true righteousness
Treat others, as thou would thyself be treated...
A man obtains a proper rule of action
By looking on his neighbour as himself"
—Monier Williams' translation in *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, 1891, pp. 547.8.

** It has been said of Gandhi that "he knew very well where the furniture of earth lay."—Ranjee Shahani, *Mr. Gandhi*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1961, p. 79.

he assigned to himself was to reshape human life, and that on a mundane plane. He ceased to be other-worldly. In the words of K. M. Munshi : "He [Gandhi] killed 'other-worldliness' which was India's obsession."[13] Even Prof. George Catlin who found in Gandhi "the punctilios of a theologican"[14] could recognize that Gandhi's "escape was not from reality but into it."[15] Gandhi based his philosophy upon action, not upon contemplation. This is a new note in the mainstream of traditional Indian philosophy which puts its primary emphasis upon contemplation. This carries decidedly a progressive significance. Because of his participation in real life, Gandhi felt no difficulty in upholding a world-affirmative view even within the general framework of his metaphysical idealism.[16]

Gandhi's ethics was imbued with the moral recovery of man. But, then, he was not merely a moral reformer. Moralists, as Niebuhr says, have placed too great an emphasis upon the value of honesty as a method of escape from injustice in political life.[17] But Gandhi was not a moralist in that sense. Much has been made out of his theory of conversion or 'change-of-heart' doctrine to suggest that he preached moral suasion as the the *only* means as opposed to organized resistance of the people. Change-of-heart theory has generally been assumed to be a theory of leaving the matter of dispute at the mercy of the wrong-doer. One may not subscribe to the Gandhian theory of conversion—it is indeed a question of one's intellectual preference—but it should not be vulgarized. Gandhi did not mean conversion in the sense as has been generally attributed to it. No doubt, Gandhi pleaded for moral suasion for it was one of his fundamental tenets to believe in the possibility of every person, however depraved, being reformed under humane and skilled treatment.[18] If, however, moral suasion failed to bring about the desired effect, would Gandhi retire from the field ? No, certainly not. Non-violent non-co-operation and civil disobedience would follow.[19] He said : "It is not a question of changing this man's heart and that man's heart, we have to do or play our part rightly and in the hope that others will also act in the right manner."[20] He felt no moral compunction

in advocating confiscation of the vested interests where necessary and take-over by the state of the possessions of the rich with the minimum exercise of violence.[21] Gandhi was not merely a moral preacher. Had he known Marx a bit closely, he could well endorse Marx: preaching is only 'so much worthless earnestness'. Gandhi was *essentially* a fighter with a new weapon that he forged in his encounter with the mightiest Empire. The technique of *satyāgraha* that he evolved was conceived primarily in terms of human needs and it proved, at the given period, to be politically realistic[22] and morally ennobling. Gandhi's morality was not prescriptive. He did not believe in the dichotomy of individual and group morality. He held that for the common man's moral and spiritual advance, wise and suitable external arrangments of organized life were as necessary as a healthy body.[23] If he were merely a spiritual savant or an ordinary moral reformer he would have cared less for the external and organizational arrangements and would have yearned for his spirit to roam about in regions of *mukti* or *nirvāṇa*. But that was not his way. He could well share the famous British poet T. S. Eliot's sentiment that the life of virtue is the purpose of human society.* But he knew well enough that moral virtue did not exist in a vacuum but entered into all social, economic and political institutions. That explains why for Gandhi economics and politics were not divorced from ethics. His understanding of what constitute good ethics and good economics may not lend itself for general approval. That is a differerent matter and should be viewed in the background of the time when such formulations were made. But the urge behind such formulations should not be missed. He wanted to rehabilitate man spiritually, morally and in his social relationships. And that is important.

* "What I am concerned with is not spiritual institutions...but the organization of values, and a direction of religious thought which must inevitably proceed to a criticism of political and economic systems... My primary interest is a change in our social attitude. ...The life of virtue is the purpose of human society."—*The Idea of a Christan Society*, Faber And Faber Ltd., London., *passim*.

In his views on sociology and economics one may find an attitude of harking back to the past if they are taken literally and without having any regard for the context in which a particular sentiment was expressed. His attack on modern industrial civilization is reminiscent of the romantic reaction against the introduction of industrial complex in society. But it would be wrong to conclude therefrom that his opposition to big machines or appurtenances of modern industrialism arose from any obscurantist faith in the virtues and efficacy of cottage industry and handicrafts. One may rightly question the ahistorical nature of his views on the subject. But what compelled him to take up such a position ? Not that an abstract spiritual principle weighed with him. Rather, he was seized with a righteous moral passion against dehumanization of man that characterizes the modern industrial-capitalist civilization.* It was a voice of eternal protest of humanism against depersonalization, a process of turning man into a cog in the wheel of the vast impersonal machine.

The basis of his political theory is equally rooted in his concern for humanity.[24] His passion for service flowed out of his inexhaustible love for man. His was a philosophy of love. But "Love for him", as has been rightly pointed out by Kripalani, "was a collective and not an individual tie—love of the poor, love of humanity."[25] Gandhi's humanism was not a milk-and-water sentimentalism, but manliness and defiance of evil. There is a dialectic of love and hate in human life. We are not sure whether Gandhi recognized this operation of dialectic. Possibly he did not. He, like Buddha and Christ, like any other ethical idealist, preached love (and practised, too) to conquer hatred. But he bore intense hatred too. It was hatred of a new quality, hatred without spitefulness. Because of his optimistic faith in what he considered to be the

* cf. Hegel saw the employed individual as completely subordinate to a mechanical system, to economic law, to the blind necessities of finance and the market. He described industrial society as "a vast system of mutual interdependence, a *moving life of the dead*. This system moves hither and yon in a blind elementary way, and like a wild animal calls for strong permament control and curbing." Cited in John Lewis, *Marxism & The Open Mind*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1957, p. 153.

redemptive capacity of man, he placed man above the system and he bore no hatred for the man personally who appeared as the perpetrator of violence and exploitation. His goal was to "combine the greatest love with the greatest opposition to wrong."[26] If he hated anything he hated monopoly and concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a few ; he hated exploitation of man by man and cowardly submission to the same. Had he not been burning with an intense passion he would have failed in his responsibility as a moral person which he was through and through. This burning passion alone could inspire him to offer organized resistance to what was morally degrading. His was not a philosophy of non-resistance as preached and practised by the Christian Pacifists.

Behind the whole ethic of Gandhism one finds a passionate opposition to all relations, all conditions in which man is a humiliated, enslaved, despised creature. That is why Gandhism is a humanism.

Humanism places man above things. Man is considered to be a creative agency,* a moral and intellectual being, not an automaton. Man, for a humanist, is not an abstract concept. Humanism regards man to be a concrete, real being, living in association with other individuals. Gandhi's "was not a loyalty to abstractions ; it was a loyalty to living, human beings,"[27] observes his biographer Louis Fischer. True, he did not, or could not, recognize man as an ensemble of social relations, in the sense that Marx insisted that man must be taken in his social and historical milieu which means that one must discover man in his origin, in his evolution, in the development of society,

* cf. "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstance and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that circumstances are changed precisely by men and that the educator must himself be educated.', —Marx, Third Thesis on Feurbach, Marx-Engels, *Selected Works, two' volume edition,* Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1949, vol. 2- pp. 365-6.

"With man we enter *history.* ...the more that human beings become removed from animals in the narrower sense of the word, the more they make their history themselves, consciously..." Engels, *Dialectics of Nature,* Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, p. 48.

in his history.[28] But, then, Gandhi's concept of man was not an abstract one as was in the case of many philosophical idealists and mechanical materialists. An essentially practical man that he was, he viewed man as a concrete being, though not in his historical setting. His appeal to individual conscience and his emphasis on individual regeneration and his pronouncements on the dignity and moral authority of the individual like "The individual is the one supreme consideration"[29] or "Ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit"[30] have led many reviewers to brand him as an individualist. But his was not a case of individualism in the sense it is generally understood to be. He did not subscribe to the individualist philosophy that what is best for the individual would automatically work for the social good.*

Gandhi's concern for individual freedom does not seek the elevation of the individual ego. Nor is Gandhi's a strictly voluntaristic ethic.[31] Gandhi's individual is a social individual (though not in a Marxian sense). He did not want to subordinate the individual to an abstraction like the society or the State.** The individual should not be sacrificed at the altar of anonymous industrial complex or impersonal state machine. This is an eternal note of humanism. We have argued in our foregoing analysis the objective progressive significance of his insistence on the ultimate authority of the individual It had a trans-local appeal too. The people of the highly industrialized West alienated from the product of their labour and from themselves owing to operations of capitalist

* cf. "Thus God and Nature formed the general frame
And bade self-love and social be the same."
—Pope

** cf. "What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of 'Society' as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual is *the social being*. His life...is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*. Man, much as he may therefore be a *particular* individual (and it is precisely his peculiarity which makes him an individual, and a real *individual* social being), is just as much as the *totality*—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself ; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human life-activity."—Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Tr. : Martin Miligan, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, n.d, pp. 804-5.

economy might have found in Gandhi a true Messiah who at last took up the cudgels on behalf of the forlorn and solitary individual. Whatever view may be taken of his concern for the individual, one thing stands out in bold relief : his unswerving fidelity to the dignity of the human personality and his fundamental opposition to anything that would undermine that dignity in the slightest degree or thwart in any manner the right of every human being to live and to 'be'.

George Orwell commented : "Gandhi's teachings cannot be squared with the belief that man is the measure of all things and that our job is to make life worth living on this earth." And, "One must choose between God and Man..."[82]

It may further be pointed out that in Gandhi's humanism one misses the secular note of Renaissance humanism or the rationalist spirit of Enlightenment or the critical objectivity of socialist humanism. As we have seen earlier (see p. 113 *supra*), Gandhi's humanism was rooted in traditional Indian humanism. It was, in a fundamental philosophical sense, based on the spiritual experience of the 'oneness of being'. It was in the nature of Indian humanism not to turn the mind and achievements of Man away from the Absolute. For a clear appreciation of the difference in philosophic outlook between the motto of the West and that of India, one should refer to the source of inspiration of the respective humanisms. The fundamental inspiration of Western, secular philosophic humanism had its origin in the Protagorean dictum : 'Man is the measure of all things'. (*c.* 500 B. C.) The motto of Indian philosophy is : "This *Ātman* (the vital essence in Man) is the same in the ant, the same in the gnat, the same in the elephant, the same in these three worlds...the same in the whole universe."* Therein lies the fundamental difference in approach. But it would be inaccurate to imply that Gandhi's humanism was indifferent to 'make life worth living on this earth'. It was indeed Gandhi who struggled all his life to make life meaningful

* eṣa ātmā samaḥ pluṣiṇā samo maśakena samo
nāgena sama ebhistribhir lokaih...samo 'nena
sarveṇa.
(Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad 1,3,22, *c.* 1000 B.C.)

and all-round. He engaged all his being in the task of lifting man from the realm of existence to that of life. And that too not in a metaphysical sense, but in a real sense—close to this earth. For Gandhi, it was not a question of choice between God and Man. Because he had found his God in Man. Gandhi's achievement was that he established an objective standard of judgement in terms of social criteria. His philosophy came home to roost in human needs. The truth concept as it functions in *satyāgraha* is that of relative truth. Truth in *satyāgraha*, as has been pointed out by Dr. Bondurant, leads to ethical humanism.[33] It is, however. difficult for a rationalist or a socialist humanist to accept the philosophic premise on which Gandhi's humanism rests. But, if stripped of its metaphysical postulates, one would be amazed to find the splendid humanist core of Gandhism.

Gandhi spoke in traditional idioms. This might mislead one to infer that he wanted to look backwards, and from this a hasty conclusion is arrived at that he was anti-rationalist and hence non-humanist, if not anti-humanist. But the tempation to exploit the pre-scientific phraseology, so glaring in Gandhi's writings, should be avoided. We have traced earlier that he added new meanings to old terms. It was as a means of communicating with the vast masses of the people that he chose to speak in the traditional idiom. It is as an art that it should be understood. And his humanism can never be questioned on the pretext of this apparent traditionalism.

A few comments may be offered here from the standpoint of Marxian socialism and the present-day movement for social progress and human emancipation. Gandhi's humanism may be properly characterized as empiric humanism. This empirical approach was at the same time the source of his strength as well as of his weakness. Empiricism, though valid in a limited sense, does not approximate science. Gandhi's empiric approach is reflected in his analyses of institutional, social and economic questions, as also in his attempts to find out a solution for them by identical means. As has been noted in a sober Marxist appraisal (quite unlike the formulation of some Marxists

who branded Gandhi as an 'agent' of the Indian bourgeoisie), "The Gandhian approach to the numerous social and economic problems that confront us today and the solutions he suggested had the imprint of not rising above this empiric humanism, which is not necessarily the surest and most dependable guide in these matters."[34]

This limitation of Gandhism, considered from the socialist point of view, is to found in its ahistorical nature. History, as is understood in modern times, had no appeal for him. Gandhi was indifferent to the laws of motion of history.[35] This feeling of indifference may be explained in terms of the cultural milieu.[36]* He busied himself throughout his life in the task of perfecting moral means. However important that might have been, this concentration on means left a vital gap in his thought-process and understanding. As one reviewer of history observes in a different context: "Moralising is incompatible with historical insight."[37] He did not set himself the task of discovering the laws of social relations, the impulses, causes and effects of history. Will Durant has said: "He [Gandhi] makes very little application of history to the understanding of the present."[38] Gandhi himself admitted that he had learnt very little from history. "My method is empiric", he told Rolland."[39] Because of his temperamental or constitutional indifference to history, he did not engage himself in the task of discerning the dynamics of history and could not, therefore, consciously comprehend the dialectic of history while responding to the challenge of history and fulfilling the need of an historical epoch. It may sound strange; nevertheless, it is true. As Amaury De Riencourt observes: "An immense historical phenomenon himself, Gandhi had no more conception of and no more feeling for historical significance than the average Indian farmer. They both moved onward when their instinct told them that another imperial bastion was about to crumble, and thus onward, until there was nothing left of the disintegrating imperial structure."[40] Horace Alexander, a very

* See pp. 125-8 supra.

sympathetic reviewer, observes in his estimate of Gandhi: "He sees the world with the eyes of a peasant."[41] But he was not just an ordinary peasant. As Jawaharlal Nehru recorded in his *Autobiography*: "he [Gandhi] does represent the peasant masses of India; he is the quintessence of the conscious and subconscious will of these millions. It is perhaps something more than representation; for he is the idealized personification of those vast millions. Of course, he is not the average peasant. A man of the keenest intellect, of fine feeling and good taste, wide vision; very human, and yet essentially the ascetic who has suppressed his passions and emotions, sublimated them and directed them in spiritual channels; a tremendous personality drawing people to himself like a magnet, and calling out fierce loyalties and attachment—all this so utterly unlike and beyond a peasant. And yet withal he is the greatest peasant, with a peasant's outlook on affairs, and with a peasant's blindness to some aspects of life. But India is peasant India, and so he knows his India well, reacts to her slightest tremors, gauges a situation accurately and almost instinctively, and has a knack of acting at the psychological moment."[42]

This lack of understanding of the course of social development explains why he, despite his ceaseless denunciation of capitalism prompted by the most deep-felt sentiment, did not enjoin upon the toiling people to traverse the historically ordained path for establishing a higher form of social organization, i.e., socialism. But he was a socialist of another type. He was a socialist in the sense that he wanted fundamental socio-economic reconstruction, which of course was to be achieved in his own non-violent way. It was ethical humanism that shaped his concept of socialism. It is this again which explains his advocacy of humanization of social relations. And it is in that profound sociological sense—and in no other sense, we say—he could not consciously transcend the world outlook of a bourgeois. But as has been correctly pointed out by an Indian Marxist scholar: "The bourgeois consciousness of Gandhi should not, however, be confounded or identified with the sordid

consciousness of an ordinary bourgeois."[43] Had he been an ordinary bourgeois nationalist leader, he would have run for grabbing power, as had been the case with other nationalist leaders, at the expense of his principles which he held dear to his heart (the bourgeoisie profess principles only to violate them in practice) and at the cost of genuine democratic freedom for the achievement of which he led the Indian people in successive heroic battles. But that was not his way. That could never have been with him. He was made of a different mettle. His allegiance was for ever to the masses working in the fields and factories. This is no place to recount the occasions when he chose to go his own way leaving the organizational platform of the Congress to other politicians to go their own. The gulf between the leaders of the Congress on the one hand and Gandhi on the other yawned with the approaching prospect of political transfer of power on the basis of compromise which was to subvert the very foundation of genuine independence for the people. As days passed on, Gandhi became thoroughly disillusioned and he expressed his anguish in a language that could only become of him. It was a tragedy indeed—and history provides ample instances of such tragedies—that "Gandhi had been defeated by the Congress machine and by the key men in the Government," as Louis Fischer records in his biography.[44] It is not a question of the mere personal tragedy of Gandhi, it is in a sense the tragedy of the Indian Revolution itself that power came to us in a truncated form. Our bourgeois democratic revolution could not fulfil the historic democratic task—it was a half-baked, truncated revolution, if that appellation be permitted at all. It is not a question of this man's or that man' share of guilt or quota of fault. One must look beyond the surface. It was in the nature of things as they stood. For our independence was not earned—the tall claim of 'peaceful revolution' notwithstanding—it was a case of barter, a case of mutual give-and-take. This was against the very grain of Gandhi's concept. His non-violence was no substitute for surrender to evil—compromise of the fundamental interests of the people

means surrender, and nothing else ; it was on the contrary as an effective political method—his personal creed apart—that he offered this doctrine to India for her to follow. But the official leadership, truly subserving the interests of the native bourgeoisie and allied vested interests—the motive for personal power of this leader or that leader might have been the least consideration that weighed with them—failed Gandhi and the Indian Revolution too.

One may only hazard a surmise—for it is difficult to substantiate—from his prayer speeches of this period that his mind was moving in the direction of a new venture. He hoped—'a desperate dream', as Fischer calls it[45]—that 'the goodness of the people of the bottom' would 'assert itself against the mischievous influence' and 'wrong at the top'. He might have felt that the bitter ashes of this independence and the people's own real experience would in due course dispel their illusion and that they would learn again to stand on their own. He counselled patience to those who wanted him to plough a lonely furrow against the wrong way India was going.[46] It might be anybody's guess if he was biding his time and opportunity to prepare the ground for a fresh advance in terms of *satyāgraha*.[47] It is again a matter of conjecture whether the contemplated *satyāgraha* would have come about at all, for the die was already cast. The reins of history were off his hands. To Gandhi, a practical leader and a man of keen and superb organizational sense that he was, it might have appeared primarily as a problem of organization. We do not undervalue the importance of the organization in any way. It is one of the two essential elements in political action. It is the art of revolution. But the science of revolution, i.e., the analysis of the process of revolution, cannot be ignored. The dilemma that confronted India was in a fundamental sense the problem of looking at and changing history. Gandhi did not approach the problem from this standpoint. True, he wanted to give a new shape to India, but he lacked the equipment of historical insight which was so very essential for reorientation of the course of events.

The post-second world war India, particularly the days from November 1945 to July 1946, witnessed the upsurge of the common masses of the people—the students, youth, middle class employees, policemen, air force personnel and the naval ratings. It would seem, therefore, that a situation subsisted which called for vigorous organization and bold leadership with a view to bringing about the basic changes. The only historic step that could be considered legitimate from the point of view of the movement of the toiling people was to move ahead for a clean sweep of imperialism and allied vested interests. Unfortunately, however, the leadership was not forthcoming and the organization was not commensurate with the emotional upheaval. Nobody could fail to discern the essentially reformist character of the official national leadership which was more than pronounced at this phase of the national movement. Gandhi, with all his love for the masses and his supreme concern for the freedom of the common man, did not approve of the way these sporadic movements were developing. He could not endorse those actions, for his way was different. He was more than loyal to his fundamental ethic of non-violence, It was a matter of his political conviction too. He held that violent battles would not ultimately bring power to the people. If he could only look at history from an analytical, objective point of view, one might hope that the course of Indian revolution would have taken a new turn and contemporary India would have looked different. But that was not to be. He could not place himself in historic perspective. In his sincere eagerness to bring Svarāj for the masses through non-violent means, he could not realize the historical specificity of the situation and the prospect it offered. This explains why he could not actualize the need of the hour at that period. But it is too tall an order to execute. A man who awakened us from our torpor and lethargy, gave us self-confidence and dignity, made us men, so to say, and sent us to the battle-front to achieve freedom for our country at a certain historical period—it is too much to expect from him that he would also fulfil the

historical need of another age the impact of which was yet to be felt. It might be that out of our affectionate regard for him, we would have liked to see Gandhi as the Generalissimo of the battle for the establishment of socialism. The sentiment is admirable in so far as it expresses our attachment to him. Still, Gandhi's failure to assign to himself that role does not diminish his greatness by a whit.* It only affirms that greatness too is historically conditioned.**

The limitation of Gandhism should not however be ascribed to the subjective factor alone. The alleged contradictions in Gandhi—his 'immense power for good and shocking limitations'—should have to be viewed from an objective standpoint. The 'contradictions' that one may find in the views of Gandhi reflect the contradictions of his age. Gandhi's thought reflected his vision for the future and his responsiveness to the concrete demands of the people. It mirrored too the complexity of the Indian political movement and society at large and the contradictions which were embedded in the process of Indian social development.

We have pointed out Gandhi's limitation not in order to deflate his greatness but only to assess that greatness in its objective context. However indifferent he was to the course of social evolution, he was never for a while indifferent to the grinding poverty of the people and the humiliating division among men, both based on exploitation. For his only concern was to lift the millions of people out of their sub-human level of existence and to make their life human and humane too. His was the ambition to wipe every tear from every eye, as Jawaharlal Nehru so eloquently put it. It was through his tongue that the deeply felt but mute urges and

* V. Gordon Childe wrote that the 'greatness' of the great man will be all the better appreciated the more faithfully the discrepancies between his conscious intuitions and the consequences of his acts, as revealed to historical reflection, are exposed and emphasized."—*What Is History?* Henry Schuman, New York, 1953, p. 43.

** See ch. 1 for elaboration of this point.

aspirations of the people found their expression. He was indeed the speech of the nation.*

Speaking of Gandhi to Havelock Elis, Olive Schreiner, the gifted novelist, said : "Mr. Gandhi spoke as though he were a mere echo ; echo of of what ? Of no recognizable human virtue ; it was as though the Collective Unconscious of his country was muttering and mumbling through him. Have you ever known a whole nation to speak at the same time ? Mr. Gandhi, I knew, was India and India was Mr. Gandhi. How could I remain deaf to this vastness ? The tones, though gentle and caressing, had in them an undercurrent of oceanic thunder."[48]

Someone has said of him : "Here is a man who has ceased to be one of us and has become an elemental being, a gust blowing from the earth, a passion enclosed in a wizened body. In him suffering is speaking, centuries of poverty and exploitation have found a voice."[49]

This elemental humanism is the positive content of Gandhi's political and social thought which shall endure for ever. Because of this seminal humanism he retained his faith in man. "You must not lose faith in humanity,"[50] he wrote to Amrit Kaur at a period when darkness enveloped the political horizon of India.**

Sometimes, when one thinks of Gandhi standing up to the British Empire in his loin cloth and with his little spinning wheel, and then thinks of the tremendous material and military resources of the Empire—one might wonder : 'Isn't he naive—isn't the whole idea naive ?'

* cf. "The people are *silence*. I will be the advocate of this silence. I will speak for the dumb. I will speak of the small to the great and of the feeble to the strong. ···I will speak for all the despairing silent ones. I will interpret this stammering. I will interpret the grumblings, murmurs, the tumults of crowds, the complaints ill-pronounced and all these cries of beasts that through ignorance and through suffering, man is forced to utter. I will be the word of the people. I will say everything."—Victor Hugo, quoted in *Young India*, 21.7.21, p. 232.

** cf. "As I look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man."—Rabindranath Tagore, *Crisis in Civilization*, Visva-Bharati, Calcutta, 1961, p. 22.

An American journalist, Frances Gunther, has nicely answered this poser :

"Yes, it is naive.

Yet—in politics, as in art, there comes a period when sophistication ties itself up into so many knots and complications and dead-ends—when the forms of culture bear so little relation to the real life of the people—that there is only way out :

One must break the forms. One must go back to the first principles. One must, whether one prefers it or not, become naive, to find the truth again.

That in its essence is perhaps the secret of Gandhi's great power."[51]

His ideas were naive but they were nevertheless tremendously powerful—for such simplicity concealed within itself astuteness.

Gandhi combined in himself a keen sense of astute realism and the essentials of true idealism. Any philosophy of Man derives its inspiration from true idealism. It redeems the world not by separating itself, but by recognizing its worth, loving it with all its imperfections, acknowledging the legitimacy of collective action. It is only by full *participation* that it becomes possible to purify and uplift by slow degress our imperfect, but not ignoble, world. Gandhi recognized this and eagerly *participated* with all his strength to move this world from imperfection to perfection. This thirst for perfection has often led many reviewers to call him a utopian visionary. He was, and he was not. He was not a utopian visionary in the sense that he never ignored the concrete and the real. Aldous Huxley called him "a dreamer" who "had his feet firmly planted on the ground."[52] He took upon himself the mighty task of re-shaping the reality and adopted such programmes as would enable him to realize that objective. There he was hundred percent a practical man. But he dreamt too. He dreamt in terms of transcending the present ; he dreamt of a new world where poverty and exploitation would be banished for ever—where non-violence, i.e., love, would govern human life. He dreamt of a society where human individual would be

emancipated from the fetters that restrict his flowering into a personality. In that sense he was a utopian. As Ashoka Mehta so aply puts it: "In him [Gandhi] utopianism is epitomised at its highest and the best."[53] This utopianism might hold out no appeal for us today when our feelings are benumbed under the weight of over-practical considerations. But utopianism endures. It is the element of dream or utopia that stirred man into action throughout the ages and will continue to do so. Viewed from the standpoint of sociology, utopia is the ultimate point of reference which determines what questions shall be posed as to social events. Utopia, Mannheim said, inspires collective activity which aims to change the existing social reality to conform to the goals, which transcend reality.[54] Those Marxists who care less for the essential humanist content of socialism and have become habituated to deriving their political ideas and programmes from a completely amoral power-oriented outlook about men and events, might feel shocked when we say that the *ultimate* source of inspiration for Marx and Engels was nothing but this element of utopianism in the sense we have explained the term. It is not sufficiently understood that Marx's own thinking was basically humanist. Everything in Marxism—its philosophy, political economy and political theory—is subordinated to its essential humanism. But this is no place for an exposition of socialist humanism as propounded by Marx. It is true that Engels called upon the utopian socialists to abandon the *a priori* fabrication of ideal societies and to devote their energies instead to precise analyses of current social forces. But the founders of scientific socialism did not ignore the critical element of utopian socialism. This point has been very succintly summed up by an Austrian Marxist: "Marxism rejects any ideal Utopia with all the severity of science; yet Utopia is its golden background."[55] It is the singular privilege of man to conceive dreams. The one common thread that links all types of humanism is this essential utopianism. Gandhi's humanism too contained this utopianism.

Like critical-Utopians, Gandhi roused our consciousness about the necessity of social change, and unlike them, believed

in and led political action. His political action waged in one historical context was not in its immediate nature bound for the establishment of socialism. But that does not minimize its creative role. To repeat, the whole process should be viewed in its correct historical perspective, as Lenin cautioned.

What is the significance of Gandhi to a socialist humanist? In our opinion, socialists of today have much to imbibe from the essential elements of Gandhism. The socialists should treasure what was most precious in Gandhi's psyche, viz. his deep humanism, his unbounded love for humanity, his readiness to suffer and make the supreme sacrifice for the liberation of the people. Secondly, his message of fearlessness and courage is a legacy that will inspire mankind for ever. Thirdly, the Gandhian technique of dealing with large numbers of human beings *en masse*, his method of evoking self-confidence and a creative response in them, of building up their initiative step by step and then hurling them into action in a disciplined manner at the crucial historical moment, is a matter of emulation. Tridib Kumar Chaudhuri correctly points out that it should be the endeavour of any socialist in the phase of struggle against poverty, exploitation and inequality "to learn and imbibe as much as may be possible or necessary of that humanism and mass approach which made Gandhi the leader of suffering humanity for all time."[56]

This is not a plea for neo-Gandhism. If it is anything, it is a plea for treasuring the inheritance of all that is noble in Gandhi's humanism.[57]

Stefan Zweig in his inimitable style wrote of Tolstoy: "Every statesman, every sociologist will discover prophetic foresight in his fundamental criticism of our age; every artist must be spurred on by the example of this mighty poet, who tormented his soul, that he might think for all, and might battle injustice on earth with the power of his words. It is always an exquisite delight when we can regard a towering artist as a moral example also, as a man who, instead of ruling by his celebrity, makes himself the servant of humanity, and in his struggle for true ethos submits to only one out of all

the authorities on earth—his own incorruptible conscience."[58] This could well be said, with necessary changes, of Gandhi.

Gandhi belonged to Mankind. He belongs to Mankind. Not until humanity itself dies will Gandhi die. For his was a voice of eternal revolt against oppression and injustice—the eternal voice of humanism.